

D-729
W. T. Ruark & Company
Tar Bay
Private

1952

Located on an isolated site on the edge of Tar Bay, the W. T. Ruark & Company crab house, erected in 1952, remained largely unaltered until a recent adaptive reuse. Divided by an off-center partition, the larger of the two spaces was used as the picking room, while the packing room and cooler were housed in a much smaller space at the north end of the structure. The retort was located in the shed roofed porch that stretches across the water side of the packinghouse. The W. T. Ruark crab house is one of four surviving packinghouse structures to remain standing on Upper Hoopers Island.

The W. T. Ruark & Company associates, Edmund H. Parker and Willie T. Ruark, financed the construction of the Tar Bay packinghouse and operated it between 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. The women crabpickers would work at the Fishing Creek plant from 4 a.m. until 1 p.m., then go home and have dinner, and go to work again at the Tar Bay facility for the second shift. A separate fleet of workboats came into Honga Creek, and it was more convenient to have the Tar Bay facility there than to bring the crabs by truck the mile or so from Fishing Creek.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. D-729

1. Name of Property

(indicate preferred name)

historic

W. T. Ruark & Company Crab House, Tar Bay

other

2. Location

street and number

Hoopers Island Road

not for publication

city, town

Fishing Creek

x vicinity

county

Dorchester

3. Owner of Property

(give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name

W. T. Ruark & Company

street and number

2762 Hoopers Island Road

telephone

city, town

Fishing Creek

state

Maryland

zip code 21634

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Dorchester County Clerk of Court

liber PLC 232

folio 189

city, town

Cambridge

tax map

tax parcel

tax ID number 6-092209

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☐ Contributing Resource in National Register District
☐ Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
☐ Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
☐ Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
☐ Recorded by HABS/HAER
☐ Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT
☐ Other:

6. Classification

Category

- ☐ district
☒ building(s)
☐ structure
☐ site
☐ object

Ownership

- ☐ public
☒ private
☐ both

Current Function

- ☐ agriculture
☐ commerce/trade
☐ defense
☐ domestic
☐ education
☐ funerary
☐ government
☐ health care
☒ industry
☐ landscape
☐ recreation/culture
☐ religion
☐ social
☐ transportation
☐ work in progress
☐ unknown
☐ vacant/not in use
☐ other:

Resource Count

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	Total

Number of Contributing Resources
previously listed in the Inventory

7. Description

Inventory No. D-729

Condition

<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> altered

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

The W. T. Ruark crab house on Tar Bay stands at the end of a dirt lane that intersects MD Route 335 (Hooper Island Road) in the vicinity of Honga, Dorchester County, Maryland. The crab house is oriented to face west with the principal gable on a north/south axis. The ten-bay by three-bay concrete block crab house is supported on a poured concrete block foundation, and the medium pitched gable roof is covered with metal sheets.

Built in 1952, the rectangular gable roofed block crab house has a ten-bay west (main) elevation which is sheltered by a shed roofed porch supported on square posts. The ten-bay elevation is defined by a series of nine-pane windows and door openings. The window and door openings are spanned by concrete lintels. The door openings are fitted with z-batten board doors. The nine-pane windows are hinged at the header to swing out.

The south gable end is a three-bay façade with a center door opening and flanking nine-bay window openings which have lost the windows. The double z-batten doors remain in place. Each opening is spanned by a concrete lintel. The gable end, erected in frame materials, is covered with smooth board sheathing. A board door provides access into storage space under the rafters. The edge of the roof is finished with a slightly extended eave.

The east side is a ten-bay elevation with double door openings located in the fourth and ninth bay from the south corner. The window and door openings are spanned by concrete lintels, and nine-pane windows are hinged at the headers.

The north end is partially covered by a slightly shorter single-story cooler of concrete block walls and a metal roof that was built at the same time as the main building. The cooler section is flanked on its west side by a pair of nine-pane window openings that light the main building.

The rectangular crab house is divided into two spaces, a picking room and a packing room. Seven bays of the ten-bay structure define the picking room on the south side, whereas the remaining three bays include a packing and weighing room that has direct access into the cooler. Each room has exposed concrete block walls with the lower three feet painted in a dark green to contrast with the balance of the room which is painted white. Separating the two spaces is a concrete block wall pierced by a side door and a large pass-through opening fitted with a metal covered counter. The ceiling is covered with thin board sheathing. Located next to the pass-through opening is a sink above which is a hand-painted sign stating that "ALL-PICKERS-MUST-WEAR-PLASTIC-APRONS-CAPS..NETS ABSOLUTELY-NO-CLOTH-FINGER-STALLS-NO SMOKING-EATING-OR-DRINKING-WHILE-PICKING-EACH EMPLOYEE-MUST-WASH-AND-STERLIZE-HANDS-AFTER VISITING TOILETS." The sign was posted under the authority of the Maryland Health Department. A second hand-painted sign states "EVERY-ONE-MUST WASH-HANDS-PANS AND-KNIVES-AFTER EACH-WEIGHING-AND STERLIZE-EACH." A third smaller sign repeats "WASH-YOUR-HANDS."

The smaller packing and weighing room is finished in the same manner with the lower portion of the wall painted dark green. A single-leaf Z-batten door opens into the adjacent cooler. Fixed between the two gable end windows is a cast iron ice machine labeled Creasy Ice Breaker by the Ochrane Corporation of Philadelphia, Pa.

8. Significance

Inventory No. D-729

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

Specific dates

Architect/Builder

Construction dates 1952

Evaluation for:

☐ National Register

☐ Maryland Register

☒ not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

Located on an isolated site on the edge of Tar Bay, the W. T. Ruark & Company crab house, erected in 1952, remained largely unaltered until a recent adaptive reuse. Divided by an off-center partition, the larger of the two spaces was used as the picking room, while the packing room and cooler were housed in a much smaller space at the north end of the structure. The retort was located in the shed roofed porch that stretches across the water side of the packinghouse. The W. T. Ruark crab house on Tar Bay is one of three surviving packinghouses to remain standing on Upper Hoopers Island.

HISTORY AND SUPPORT

William T. Ruark was born in 1907 and managed a packinghouse for White and Nelson on Old House Point for many years. This is now the location of the Terrapin Fish Company. In 1948 he established his own company across the harbor at Fishing Creek. Ruark packed oysters, crabmeat and hard and soft shell crabs. His son, W. T. Ruark, Jr., began working with his father while he was still in high school in 1948. In the 1950s and 1960s the company sold oysters, rockfish, and crabmeat to Baltimore companies such as the McNasby Oyster Company, Atlantic Fish Company, Bay Harbor Seafood, S. Diapaula & Son, W. T. Freburger Company, and Food Fair Stores.¹ The fish were ice and sold whole to markets in Baltimore and Philadelphia. Ruark was one of the first packers to sell live crabs to restaurants and grocery stores in Baltimore to be steamed for customers to pick. At first the live crabs were packed in sugar barrels with a lump of ice to keep them cool. Later crabs were sold by the bushel basket. When the Maryland crab harvest declined in the 1950s, the company purchased crabs from Jesse Etherridge in Wauchee, North Carolina, and the Duvall Fish & Crab Company in Manns Harbor, North Carolina.² Agnes K. Ruark began working for the company in 1954 when she married William T. Ruark, Jr. Forty-five people were employed during the crab picking season in 1955. The company packed oysters for about four years selling to the McNasby Oyster Company in Baltimore, but quit in the mid 1950s because they could not make money at it.³

In 1954 Edmund H. Parker and Willie T. Ruark, trading as W. T. Ruark & Company, purchased 20,847

¹ Marshall's Express Freight Bills dated September 7, 1960 in the collection of Kevin Davidson, Cambridge, Maryland.

² Shipping Certifications dated November 1959 in the collection of Kevin Davidson, Cambridge, Maryland.

³ Invoices dated November 28, 1954 and January 6, 1955 in the collection of Kevin Davidson, Cambridge, Maryland; Interview with Agnes Ruark, Fishing Creek, May 31, 2001.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. D-729

Name W. T. Ruark & Company Crab House, Tar Bay
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 1

square feet of land on Tar Bay on Upper Hoopers Island in the village of Honga. They financed the construction of a concrete block crab house and ran it from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. The women crabpickers would work at Fishing Creek from 4 a.m. until 1 p.m., then go home and have dinner, and go to work again at the Tar Bay plant for a second shift. A separate fleet of workboats came into the Honga Creek, and it was more convenient to have a second facility there than to bring the crabs by truck the mile or so to Fishing Creek.

William T. Ruark, Sr. died in 1965, and his son and daughter-in-law took over the business. In the 1970s the company sold crabmeat, hard and soft shell crabs, and oysters, and had the subsidiary packinghouse on Tar Bay. In 1977 the Fishing Creek plant employed 35 people; seven men and 28 women.⁴

The number of employees has remained stable until the present; but the firm no longer processes oysters. At the peak of the business they had 65 pickers, all local women from Hoopers Island. The company began to employ Mexican migrant workers hired under the Federal H2-B, non-agricultural temporary worker program in 1992.⁵ In 2001 they employed 27 Mexicans and 4 local women. The Ruarks continue to purchase crabs from North Carolina and Virginia, and sell crabmeat to restaurants and wholesalers in Ocean City, Maryland and Rehoboth, Delaware, Washington, DC, and Baltimore. Their brand name is "Best Yet." The company has a fleet of eight trucks that are driven to Baltimore and Ocean City daily. A broker handles most of their crabmeat. Crab chum is taken to Spicers Lumber yard to be mixed with sawdust for fertilizer.⁶

⁴ Directory of the Maryland Manufacturers 1977-78, Maryland Department of Economic and Community Development, p. 166.

⁵ Interview with Agnes T. Ruark, Jr., Fishing Creek, April 27, 1999, Oral History 128.

⁶ Interview with Agnes T. Ruark, Jr., Fishing Creek, May 31, 2001.

Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of
Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. D-729

Name W. T. Ruark & Company Crab House, Tar Bay
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 2

William T. Ruark and Company
Tar Bay
Dorchester County, Maryland
Chain of title

PLC 232/189

Agnes K. Ruark, widow of William T. Ruark

to

9/24/1984

William T. Ruark, Jr.

Parcel No. 3 20,847 square feet of land on Tar Bay...improved by
a packinghouse and appurtenances

RSM 89/338

Emory E. Parker and Eva E. Parker his wife

to

6/30/1954

Edmund H. Parker and Sybil J. Parker his wife
Willie T. Ruark & Agnes K. Ruark his wife
Co-partners trading as W. T. Ruark & Co.

Containing 20,847 square feet of land, now improved by a newly erected
packing house and appurtenances

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

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Name W. T. Ruark & Company Crab House, Tar Bay
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 3

WHM 5/271

T. Sangston Insley, trustee

to

11/4/1918

Emory E. Parker

Constituting the home place of the late Charles R. Parker

FJH 7/635

William L. Meekins and others

to

5/16/1870

Charles R. Parker

9. Major Bibliographical References

Inventory No. D-729

Dorchester County Land Records, various volumes, Dorchester County Courthouse.

(For a full list of resources see footnotes)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property 1/2 acre
Acreage of historical setting 20,847 square feet
Quadrangle name Honga, Maryland

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

The historic metes and bounds of this property are coincidental with the current boundary of the lot.

11. Form Prepared by

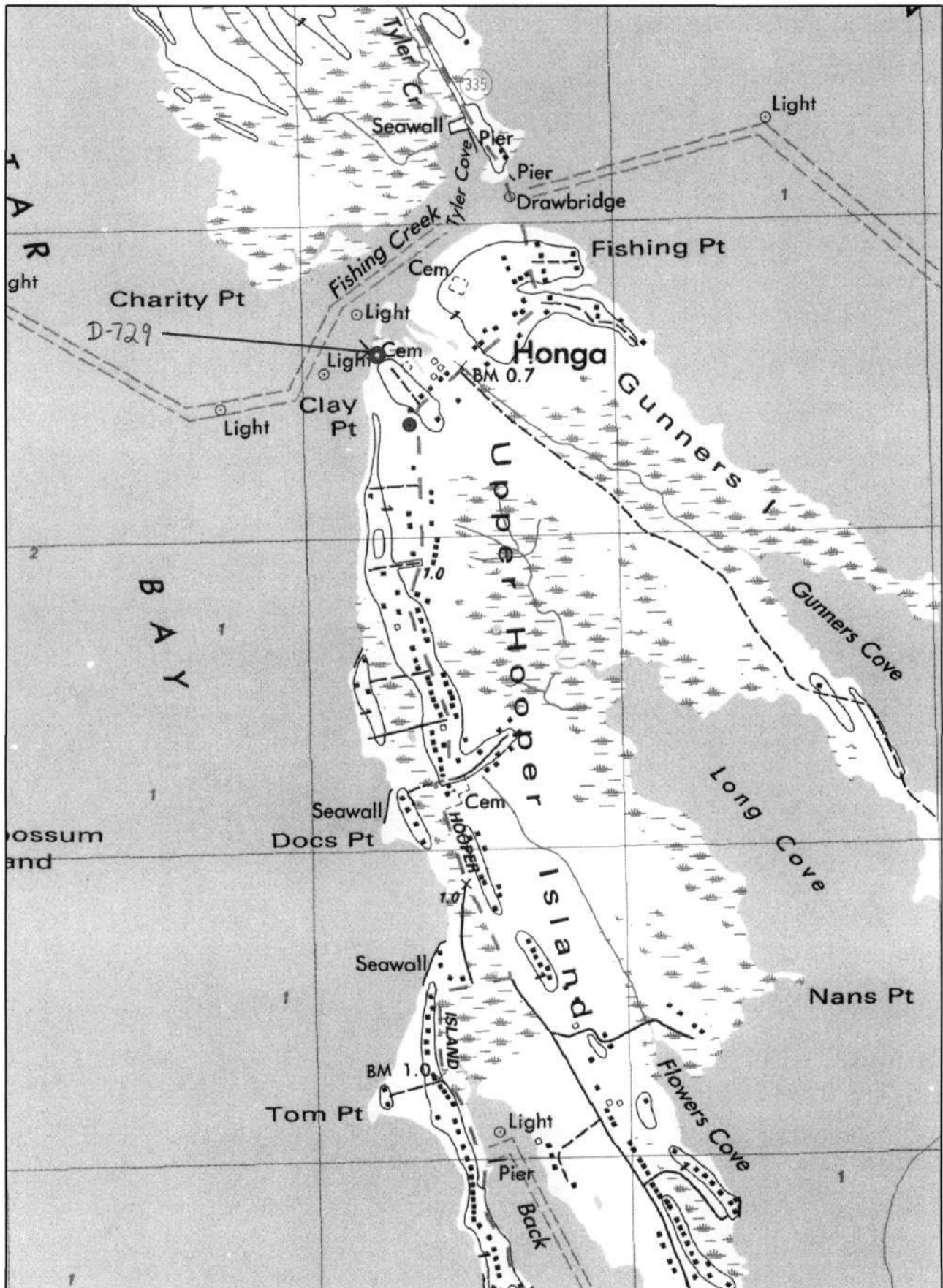
name/title	Paul B. Touart, Architectural Historian and Virginia Jenkins, Business Historian, CBMM		
organization	Private Consultants	date	6/10/2001
street & number	P. O. Box 5	telephone	410-651-1094
city or town	Westover	state	Maryland 21871

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
DHCD/DHCP
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023
410-514-7600

D-729
W. T. Ruark & Co. Crab House
Tar Bay
Honga Quadrangle





D-729

W. T. RUARK & COMPANY, Tax Bay
HONGA, DORCHESTER Co., MD.

SOUTHWEST ELEVATION

6/2001, Paul Touart, PHOTOGRAPHER

NEZ. (MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

1 OF 12



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W. T. Ruark & Co. Tax Bay
Hanga, Dorchester Co. MD.

SOUTHWEST ELEVATION

6/2001, Paul Touart, PHOTOGRAPHED
NEG. / MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

2 OF 12



D-729

W. T. Ruark & Company, Tar Bay
Houma, DORCHESTER Co., MD.

SOUTH ELEVATION

6/2001, PAUL TONAH, PHOTOGRAPHER

N.E./ MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

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D-729

W. T. Ruark & Co, Tor Bay
HONGKONG, DORCHESTER CO. AND
SOUTHEAST ELEVATION

6/2001, PAUL TONART, PHOTOGRAPHER
NEZ/ and. HISTORICAL TRUST

4 or 12

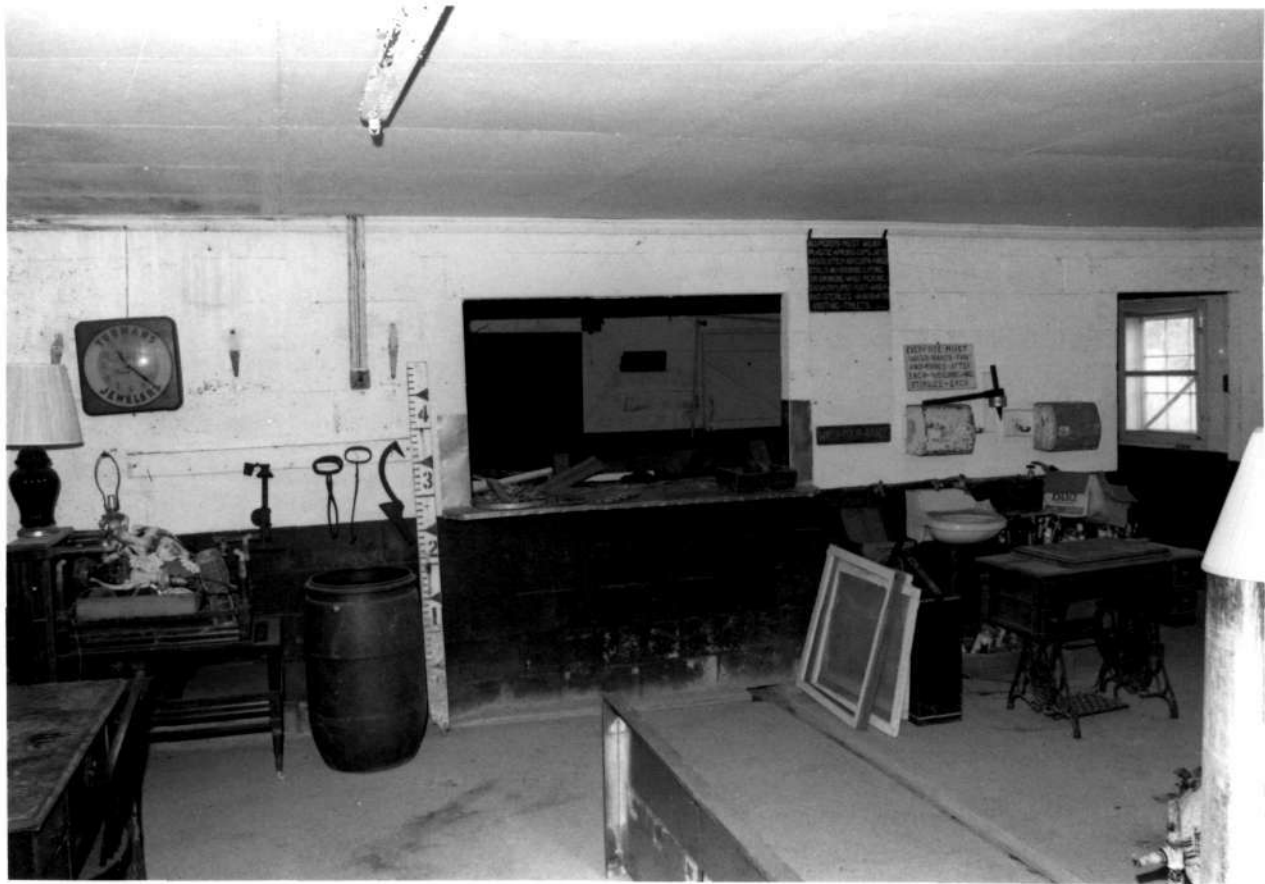


D-729

W. T. Ruark & Co., Tar Bay
HONGA, DORCHESTER Co., MD.

RETREAT CASING, DISCARDED on SITE
6/2001, PAUL TOWART, PHOTOGRAPHER
NEZ. / MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

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D-729

W. T. Ruark & Co., Tax Day
Honla, Dorchester Co., Md.

PICKING ROOM LOOKING INTO PACKING ROOM

6/2001, PAUL TOWART, PHOTOGRAPHER

NEZ./MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

6 OF 12

ALL-PICKERS-MUST WEAR-
PLASTIC-APRONS-CAPS-AND-NETS
ABSOLUTELY-NO-CLOTH-FINGER-
STALLS-NO-SMOKING-EATING-
OR-DRINKING-WHILE-PICKING-
EACH-EMPLOYEE-MUST-WASH-
AND-STERILIZE-HANDS-AFTER
VISITING-TOILETS.

EVERY-ONE-MUST
WASH-HANDS-PANS
AND-KNIVES-AFTER
EACH-WEIGHING-AND
STERILIZE-EACH

WASH-YOUR-HANDS



D-729

W. T. RUMBLE & Co., Tax Pay
HUNTER, DORCHESTER Co., MD.

Detail of INNER PARTITION

6/2001, PAUL TOWART, PHOTO.

NEED. MID. HISTORICAL TRUST

7 OF 12

ALL-PICKERS-MUST WEAR -
PLASTIC-APRONS-CAPS^{OR} NETS
ABSOLUTELY-NO-CLOTH-FINGER
STALLS-NO-SMOKING-EATING-
OR-DRINKING-WHILE-PICKING-
EACH-EMPLOYEE-MUST-WASH-
AND-STERILIZE - HANDS-AFTER
VISITING-TOILETS.

BY
MD HEALTH DEPT

D-729

W. T. Ruark & Co., Tax Bldg
Hanna, Dorchester Co., MD.
Hanna Dept. Sign

6/2001, Paul Touart, photo.

NEG/MD. Historical Trust

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AFTER

BY
HEALTH DEPT.

EVERY-ONE-MUST
WASH-HANDS-PANS
AND-KNIVES-AFTER
EACH-WEIGHING-AND
STERILIZE-EACH

ANDS



D-729

W. T. Ruark P. C., Tar Bay
Hunaa; DORCHESTER Co. MD.

Hammer Dent. Sign

6/2001, Paul Tourant, photo.

NEG./MD. Historical Trust

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D-729

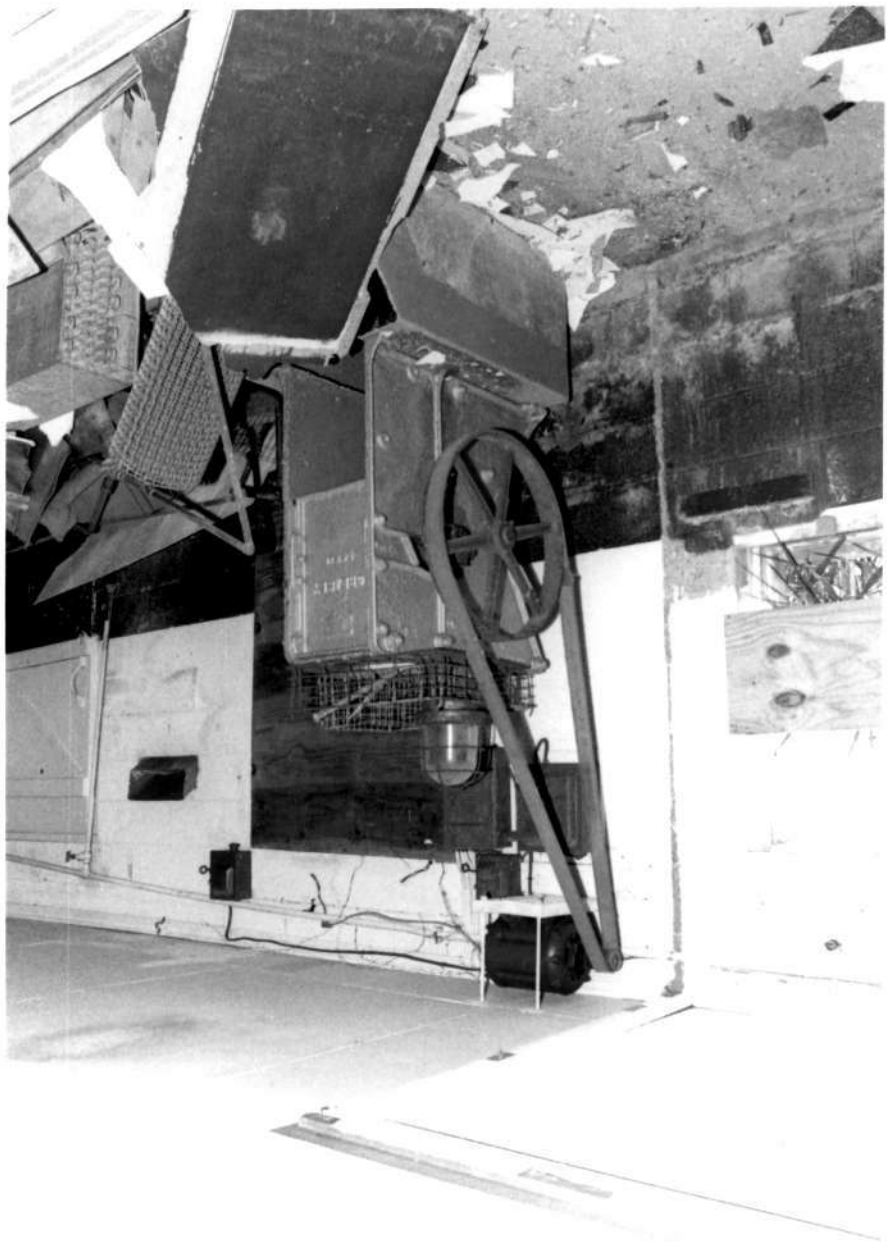
W. T. RUARK & Co., TAR BAY
HONOLULU, DORCHESTER Co., MD.

PACKING ROOM-DOOR TO COOLER

6/2001, PAUL TOWARD, PHOTOGRAPHER

NEZ./MTB HISTORICAL TRUST

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D-729

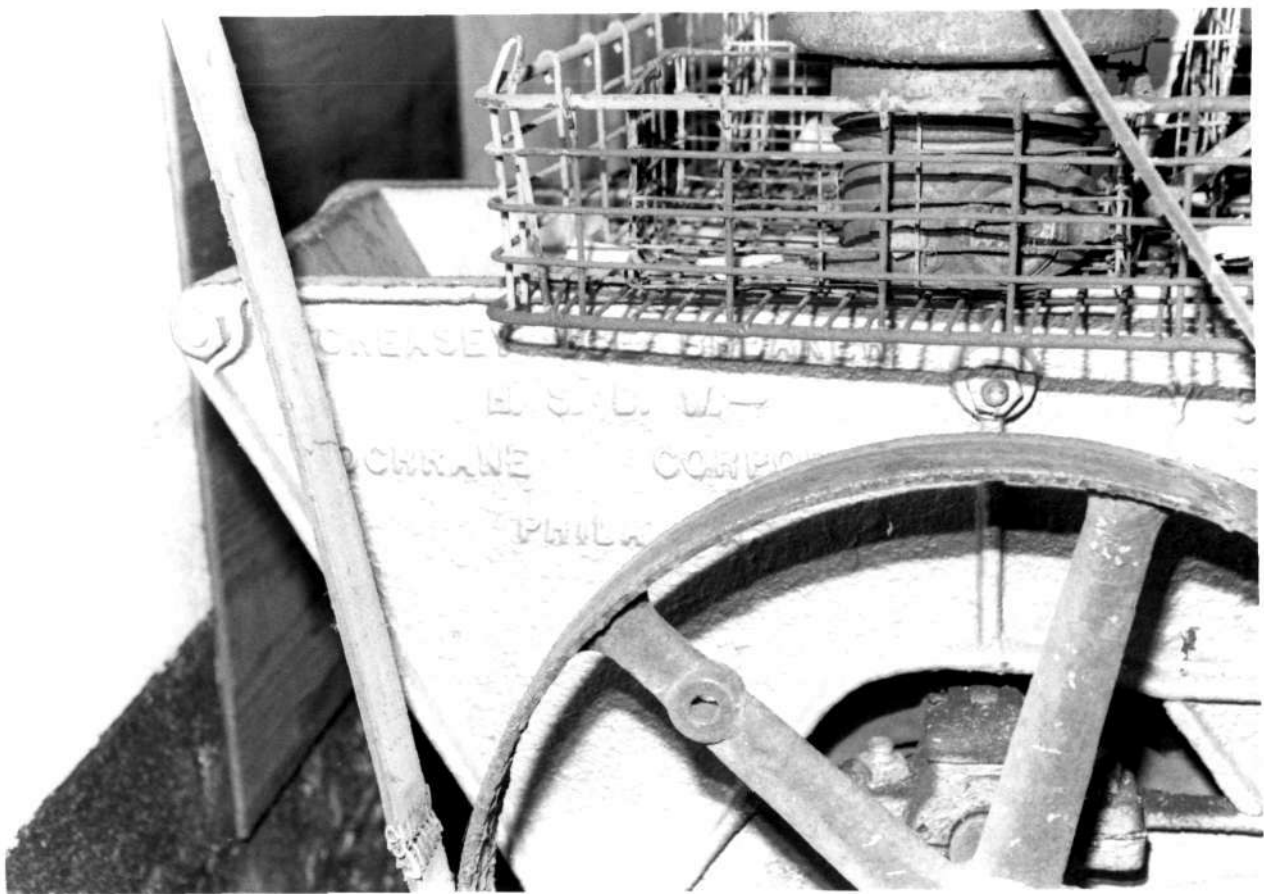
W. T. Ruark & Co., Tar Bay
Hunch, Dorchester Co., MD.

ICE MACHINE

6/200, PAUL TOURANT, PITUIT.

NEZ./MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

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D-729

W. T. Ruark & Co., M.D.

Honk, Dorchester Co., M.D.

Detail of ICE METER

6/20/11, Paul Tourant, Patuxent River

NEG. / M.D. Historical Trust

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